THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS

AT

# THE MONK'S REST

AND

# THE BUGLE HOTEL

DAVID CLARKE

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# INTRODUCTION

For the past two years, four of us have gathered every Monday morning for coffee at The Monks Rest, where we have always been warmly welcomed.

The Coffee Table

Our conversations have ranged widely — from religion and theology to politics and current affairs. Each of us comes from a different walk of life, with varied vocational and academic backgrounds, and our views on matters of faith are shaped by the breadth of our life experience, having now reached our middle to late seventies.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Amanda for her kind hospitality and the warm welcome she has continually extended to us.

For those interested in exploring more of the themes and reflections that have arisen from our discussions, please see the list of Further Publications at the back of this book.

A STUDY IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

This Study Guide has been prepared to accompany A Body of Divinity — Book One by Dr John Gill, in its modernised and revised edition prepared by David Clarke.

It is intended for serious students of theology who desire not merely to read the work, but carefully to understand, examine, and give an account of the doctrines set forth within it. The questions and exercises are designed to encourage thoughtful reading, doctrinal comprehension, and careful comparison with the Holy Scriptures.

Students are encouraged to search the Scriptures diligently, proving all things by the Word of God, and where necessary to consult the original writings of Dr John Gill for fuller explanation and theological depth.

The purpose of this guide is not simply academic, but spiritual and practical — that readers may grow in the knowledge of God, in sound doctrine, and in their ability to explain and defend the great truths of the Christian faith.

This Study Guide should therefore be used alongside:

A Body of Divinity — Book One
by Dr John Gill,
modernised and revised by David Clarke.

# A BODY OF DIVINITY

## BOOK ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Having completed an exposition of the whole Bible, both of the Old and New Testaments, I considered what work might best follow for the further instruction of the people under my care. My thoughts led me to undertake a scheme of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity — first the former, and then the latter — the one being the foundation of the other, and both closely connected together.

Systematic Divinity, I am aware, has become greatly unpopular in our age. Formulas and articles of faith, creeds, confessions, catechisms, and summaries of divine truth are widely criticised and rejected. Yet what art or science has not been reduced to a system? Physic, metaphysics, logic, rhetoric, and every branch of learning have been arranged into orderly systems. Philosophy itself has had its various schools and systems. Not to mention the numerous sects of ancient philosophy, the Cartesian system greatly prevailed in the last age, just as the Newtonian system does in the present.

Medicine, jurisprudence, and every art and science are reduced to a system or body, which is simply an orderly arrangement of the several parts and doctrines belonging to that science. Why then should Divinity — the noblest of all sciences — be left without a system?

Evangelical truths are scattered throughout the Holy Scriptures. To gather them together and arrange them in a regular and orderly manner cannot reasonably be considered disagreeable. Rather, it must be useful for a clearer understanding of divine truth, better retention in memory, and for showing the harmony and agreement that exists among the doctrines of grace.

Accordingly, we find that Christian writers in ancient times attempted works of this nature through formulas of faith, symbols, and creeds produced during the first centuries of Christianity. Since the Reformation, bodies and systems of divinity, together with confessions of faith, have been composed with even greater care, consistency, and precision. These have proved highly useful in leading men into the knowledge of evangelical doctrine,

establishing them in the truth, and demonstrating the agreement of sound divines and churches in the principal doctrines of the Christian faith.

The Scriptures themselves contain summaries and systems of doctrine and duty. What a remarkable compendium of law is found in the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments — given especially for the use of Israel and perfectly suited to their condition.

The New Testament also speaks of "the form of doctrine" delivered to believers, "the form of sound words" which was to be held fast, and "the proportion of faith" according to which ministers were to prophesy and preach. (Romans 6:17; Romans 12:6; 2 Timothy 1:13)

The word "Theology" is Greek in origin and signifies a discourse concerning God and things pertaining to Him. Theology, or Divinity, is simply the doctrine concerning God and divine things. A Divine, or Theologue, is one who understands and teaches those sacred truths.

Natural theology may be considered either as it existed in Adam before the Fall, or as it exists in fallen mankind afterward. Before the Fall, Adam possessed extensive knowledge, both divine and natural, moral and civil. Being created in the image of God, he possessed knowledge as well as righteousness and holiness.

Supernatural theology, revealed directly by God, may next be traced through its rise and progress throughout history. The first revelation of evangelical truth after the Fall was given in the promise spoken to the serpent: "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The prophets spoke with increasing clarity concerning the incarnation of Christ, His sufferings, His offices, justification by faith, pardon through His blood, and redemption accomplished by His atoning work.

Yet alongside this revelation arose corruption: idolatry, false worship, Pharisaic tradition, Sadducean unbelief, and eventually the darkness of Antichrist and Popery.

Though divine truth was obscured for many centuries, God preserved a witness to His gospel among faithful men such as the Waldenses, the Albigenses, Wickliffe, Huss, and Jerome of Prague; until the Reformation was raised up through men such as Zwingli

and Luther, by whom evangelical light again spread through Europe.

Let us therefore search the Scriptures diligently, to determine whether the doctrines set before us are agreeable to them or not.

I have little reason to expect this work will meet with favourable reception from the world generally. Yet if it may serve to preserve sacred truth, to enlighten any into the knowledge of it, or to establish believers in it, then I shall not be troubled by whatever opposition or reproach may arise from the enemies of those truths.

## HOW TO USE THE STUDY QUESTIONS

The student should first read the Introduction carefully and thoughtfully before attempting to answer the study questions.

After completing the reading, the student should then proceed to answer the forty questions provided at the end of the section.

The student is permitted, and indeed encouraged, to reread and study the text carefully while answering the questions. This process of repeated reading is intentional and forms part of the method of study used throughout this edition.

Experience shows that many important doctrinal statements, arguments, and scriptural observations may easily be overlooked during a first reading. By returning to the text while answering the questions, the student will often discover truths and details that were previously missed.

The purpose of the questions is therefore not merely examination, but careful instruction, theological reflection, and a fuller understanding of the doctrines being taught.

Students are encouraged to look up the Scripture references carefully and to compare Gill's teaching with the Word of God itself.

It is recommended that answers be written clearly and thoughtfully rather than hurriedly, so that the student may benefit fully from the study of the material.

## STUDY QUESTION (Introduction)

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Gill decide to write a system of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity after completing his exposition of the Scriptures?

2. According to Gill, how are doctrinal divinity and practical divinity related to one another?

3. Why does Gill believe systematic theology has become unpopular in his age?

4. What examples does Gill give of other sciences that have been reduced into systems?

5. Why does Gill believe divinity should also be arranged systematically?

6. What benefits does Gill say arise from gathering evangelical truths into an orderly system?

7. What examples of early Christian creeds and confessions does Gill refer to?

8. What six foundational doctrines are listed in Hebrews 6:1–2?

9. What does Gill mean by "a form of sound words"?

10. Why does Gill reject the idea that confessions should only use the exact words of Scripture?

11. According to Gill, what dangers arise if explanation and interpretation are forbidden?

12. How does Gill distinguish an Arian from an Athanasian?

13. What does the word "Theology" mean?

14. What does Gill say concerning the use of the word "Divinity"?

15. Who was commonly called "St John the Divine"?

## DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS

16. Why does Gill believe theology is "the noblest science"?

17. How does Gill defend the legitimacy of creeds and confessions of faith?

18. Why does Gill believe systematic theology aids understanding and memory?

19. How does Gill argue that Scripture itself contains summaries and systems of doctrine?

20. Why does Gill believe the ministry would become ineffective if ministers were restricted to using only the exact words of Scripture?

21. What distinction does Gill make between the true God and the false gods of paganism?

22. How does Gill describe natural theology before and after the Fall?

23. Why does Gill believe Adam's Fall greatly darkened human understanding?

24. What evangelical truths does Gill see in the coats of skins given to Adam and Eve?

25. How did the sacrifices of the Old Testament point forward to Christ?

26. What does Gill mean when he says the ceremonial law was "the Jews' gospel"?

27. How does Gill describe the decline of supernatural theology

after the prophetic age?

28. What errors does Gill associate with the Sadducees and Pharisees?

29. How does Gill describe the corruption introduced through scholastic theology?

30. What role does Gill believe the Reformation played in restoring evangelical light?

## REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

31. Why do you think systematic theology is often resisted in modern Christianity?

32. In what ways can creeds and confessions preserve sound doctrine?

33. How can false teaching enter the church when doctrine is left undefined?

34. Why is doctrinal precision important in preaching and teaching?

35. What dangers arise when men follow "their own fancies" instead of Scripture?

36. How does Gill connect theology with worship and practical Christian living?

37. Why is the history of doctrinal decline important for modern Christians to understand?

38. In what ways does modern Christianity resemble some of the errors Gill warns against?

39. Why is the preservation of evangelical truth important for future generations?

40. How can systematic theology strengthen both ministers and ordinary believers?

Chapter 1

# OF GOD, HIS WORD, NAMES, NATURE, PERFECTIONS, AND PERSONS

## OF THE BEING OF GOD

Having undertaken to write a System of Theology, or a Body of Doctrinal Divinity, and theology being nothing more than a discourse concerning God — His nature, names, perfections, and persons; His purposes, providences, works, ways, and Word — I shall begin with the Being of God, and the proofs and evidences of it.

This doctrine is the foundation of all religion. If there is no God, then religion is vain, and it matters little what men believe or practise, since there is no supreme Being to whom they are accountable for either faith or conduct.

Some have thought that the existence of God ought not to be argued at all, because it is a first principle and a self-evident truth. Yet such is the malice of Satan, who suggests the contrary to the minds of men; such is the corruption of wicked men, who willingly entertain those suggestions; and such is the weakness even of some godly persons, who are sometimes troubled with doubts and fears concerning it, that it cannot be improper to strengthen our minds with arguments confirming this great truth.

## 1. The Universal Consent of Mankind

My first argument for the Being of God is drawn from the general consent of mankind in all nations and throughout all ages of the world. The belief that there is a God has universally prevailed among men; and it is unreasonable to suppose such universal agreement could exist if the thing itself were false.

Even heathen writers observed this. Aristotle declared that all men possess some persuasion of Deity. Cicero likewise observed that no nation is so savage or barbarous as to be entirely without some notion of the gods. Though men differ greatly concerning what sort of god they worship, yet all acknowledge some divine power and nature.

Again, Cicero says that there is no creature except man that possesses knowledge of God, and no nation so fierce or uncivilised that it does not recognise the necessity of some deity. Seneca likewise affirmed that no nation has ever existed so abandoned and immoral as to believe there is no God.

Plutarch made the remarkable observation that while cities may be found without walls, kings, wealth, theatres, or schools, no man has ever seen a city without temples, prayers, sacrifices, or gods.

These testimonies are especially striking because they were spoken at a time when idolatry greatly prevailed and the true knowledge of God had been largely obscured. Yet even then mankind universally retained some sense of Deity.

The heavenly bodies — the sun, moon, and stars — became among the first objects of false worship. Job plainly refers to this form of idolatry:

"If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed…" (Job 31:26–27)

Though such idolatry demonstrates the dreadful corruption and ignorance of mankind, it also strongly confirms the force of this argument: men would rather worship false gods than acknowledge no god at all.

## 2. The Light and Law of Nature

The second argument for the Being of God is taken from the law and light of nature — that inward impression of Deity upon the mind of man.

The apostle Paul confirms this when he declares that even the Gentiles, who lacked the written law of Moses, nevertheless had "the work of the law written in their hearts" (Romans 2:15).

Though the Fall has greatly darkened man's understanding, the light of nature has not been entirely extinguished. Men still possess sufficient awareness of God to leave them without excuse.

## 3. The Works of Creation

The third argument proving the Being of God is drawn from the works of creation.

"The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal

power and Godhead." (Romans 1:20)

The visible creation plainly declares the existence and power of its Creator.

When we consider the heavens above us, the atmosphere surrounding the earth, the stars spread throughout the sky, and especially the sun — that inexhaustible fountain of light and heat — we are compelled to acknowledge an all-wise and almighty Creator.

The structure of the human body especially reveals divine wisdom. Every organ, nerve, muscle, and faculty is perfectly adapted to its purpose.

Even more wonderful is the soul of man.

It possesses understanding, reason, judgment, memory, imagination, conscience, affections, and will.

Above all, the soul bears the image of God and possesses immortality.

Such a creature cannot owe its origin to chance, matter, or self-creation, but only to God — "the Father of spirits."

## 4. The Preservation and Government of the World

The fourth argument for the Being of God is taken from the continual preservation and government of the world.

As the world was created by God, so it is sustained by Him.

The regular succession of seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, day and night, rain and fruitful seasons, all plainly reveal the providential care of God.

## 5. Extraordinary Events and Miracles

The fifth argument may be drawn from extraordinary events, heroic actions, wonders, and miracles.

The miracles of Moses, the prophets, Christ, and the apostles plainly testify to the existence and operation of God.

## 6. Prophecy and Fulfilled Predictions

The sixth argument arises from prophecy and the fulfilment of future events.

Only an omniscient Being can certainly foretell future events.

The fulfilment of prophecy therefore provides strong evidence for the existence of God.

## 7. The Testimony of Conscience

The seventh argument is taken from the fears of men, the accusations of conscience, and the dread of future judgment.

Conscience acts as a witness within man, accusing or excusing according to his conduct.

## 8. Divine Judgments in the Worldd

The final argument for the Being of God is taken from the judgments executed in the world.

The universal Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the death of Herod, and the sudden judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira all testify to the righteous government of God.

Who can seriously consider such things and yet deny the existence of God?

## STUDY QUESTIONS — CHAPTER 1

## OF THE BEING OF GOD

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Gill begin his system of theology with the Being of God?

2. Why does Gill believe it is necessary to defend the existence of God?

3. What is Gill's first argument for the existence of God?

4. Which heathen writers does Gill quote in support of the universal belief in deity?

5. What examples does Gill give of idolatry among the nations?

6. How does Gill explain the rise of false religion after Babel?

7. Why does Gill believe idolatry actually supports belief in the existence of God?

8. What distinction does Gill make between speculative atheists and practical atheists?

9. Why does Gill reject claims that some nations possess no concept of deity?

10. What is Gill's second argument for the Being of God?

11. How does Romans 2:15 support Gill's argument from natural law?

12. Why does Gill reject the idea that belief in God was invented by politicians?

13. How does Gill use man's desire for happiness as evidence for

God's existence?

14. What is Gill's third argument for the Being of God?
15. How does creation reveal "his eternal power and Godhead"?
16. What examples from nature does Gill use to demonstrate divine wisdom?
17. Why does Gill regard the human body as evidence of God's existence?
18. What faculties of the human soul does Gill describe?
19. Why does Gill believe the soul proves the existence of God?
20. What is Gill's fourth argument for the Being of God?
21. How does divine providence sustain the world according to Gill?
22. Why does Gill believe civil government points to divine providence?
23. What is Gill's fifth argument for the existence of God?
24. How do miracles testify to divine power?
25. What is Gill's sixth argument for the Being of God?
26. Why does fulfilled prophecy require an omniscient God?
27. What is Gill's seventh argument for the Being of God?
28. How does conscience testify to God's existence?
29. What examples does Gill give of guilty fear and inward terror?
30. What is Gill's eighth and final argument for the existence of God?

## DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS

31. Why does Gill believe religion collapses if there is no God?

32. How does universal human belief in deity support the doctrine of God's existence?

33. Why does Gill believe atheism is contrary to human nature?

34. How does the image of God in man relate to natural knowledge of God?

35. Why is natural revelation insufficient for salvation?

36. What distinction does Gill make between natural theology and supernatural theology?

37. How does creation reveal both the wisdom and power of God?

38. Why does Gill believe self-creation is impossible?

39. How does the human conscience function as a witness to divine judgment?

40. Why does Gill regard providence as continual evidence of God's existence?

41. How does Gill connect divine government with political order?

42. Why are miracles impossible without divine intervention?

43. How does prophecy demonstrate the omniscience of God?

44. Why do inward fears and terrors support the doctrine of divine judgment?

45. How do divine judgments in history testify to the righteous government of God?

46. Why do many modern people reject the evidence for God found in creation?

47. In what ways does conscience continue to testify against sin in modern society?

48. Why are men often more willing to worship false gods than acknowledge the true God?

49. How does modern atheism resemble the "practical atheism" Gill describes?

50. Why is the human soul such powerful evidence for divine creation?

51. What aspects of creation most strongly testify to God's wisdom and power?

52. Why does Gill place great importance on divine providence?

53. How should the doctrine of God's continual government affect daily Christian living?

54. In what ways do fulfilled prophecies strengthen faith in divine revelation?

55. Why does fear of judgment remain deeply rooted in human nature?

56. How should Christians answer modern objections to the existence of God?

57. What lessons should believers learn from divine judgments recorded in Scripture?

58. How does Gill's doctrine of God differ from modern vague spirituality?

59. Why is a right understanding of God foundational to all theology?

60. How can the study of God's Being deepen worship, humility, and reverence?

A STUDENT STUDY GUIDE TO ACCOMPANY A BODY OF DIVINITY — BOOK I

STANDARD CHAPTER TEMPLATE

CHAPTER TITLE

INTRODUCTION STUDENT STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter Overview

The Introduction explains the purpose of both A Body of Divinity — Book I and this accompanying Student Study Guide.

Key Themes

1. The importance of studying the doctrine of God.
2. The purpose of republishing Gill's theology.
3. The need for doctrinal clarity in modern times.

Comprehension Questions

1. What is the primary purpose of this Student Study Guide?
2. Why was A Body of Divinity — Book I rewritten into clearer modern English?
3. How is this Study Guide intended to be used alongside the main volume?
4. What dangers in modern Christianity are mentioned in the Introduction?
5. Why has a multiple-choice format been included throughout the Study Guide?

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Who originally wrote A Body of Divinity?

A. Charles Spurgeon

B. John Calvin C.

John Gill D.

Matthew Henry

2. Who prepared and edited this present edition?

A. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

B. David Clarke

C. John Owen D.

Thomas Watson

3. What is the main subject of Book I?

A. Church history

B. Bible translation

C. The doctrine of God

D. The nation of Israel

4. What is the primary purpose of this Student Study Guide?

A. To replace the main volume

B. To simplify theology into short sayings

C. To assist students studying the main text

D. To remove difficult doctrines

5. According to the Introduction, theology should ultimately lead unto:

A. Intellectual pride

B. Religious debate only

C. Financial success

D. Reverence and worship

Answer Key

1. C
2. B
3. C
4. C
5. D